



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Halton

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"The impact that local Healthwatch have is vitally important. Healthwatch are empowering their communities to share their experiences. They're changing the health and care landscape and making sure that people's views are central to making care better and tackling health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our chair

At Healthwatch Halton, our mission is simple: to make sure local people's voices are heard when it comes to health and social care.

Over the past year, we've:

- Spoken to over 5,800 people.
- Attended 276 outreach sessions across Halton.
- Gathered real stories that are helping improve local services.

Thanks to your feedback:

- Warrington Hospital is improving updates for patients waiting for care.
- Whiston Hospital has made signage clearer and appointment letters easier to understand.

We're proud to say that local voices are helping shape decisions at the highest levels. Through our partnerships with other Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside, we've helped influence how NHS services measure success—especially in GP access and primary care.

None of this would be possible without our amazing team of volunteers. Your time and dedication help us reach more people and make a bigger impact.

A huge thank you also goes to our staff team for their hard work, and to our Advisory Board members for their continued support and guidance.

Together, we're making health and care services better for everyone in Halton



"Over the past year, Healthwatch Halton has continued to champion the voices of local people, using their stories to shape and improve health and care services. From hospitals to high streets, we've listened, shared insight, and worked to make sure services better reflect the needs of our community."

Lydia Hughes, Chair, Healthwatch Halton

About us

Healthwatch Halton is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

To make sure that people's experiences help make health and care better.



Our values are:

Equity: Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power



"Healthwatch Halton is a valued partner of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, playing a vital role in ensuring the people of Halton – including children and young people – remain at the centre of what we do; driving meaningful quality improvement and shaping services that make a difference to our residents."

Denise Roberts, Associate Director of Quality and Safety Improvement
Halton Place and Warrington Place

Our year in numbers

We supported more than 16,900 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 3 staff (2.5 FTE) and, our work is supported by 9 volunteers.

Reaching out:



We carried out **276** outreach sessions, engaging with **5,831** people, of which **1,838** people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

15,104 people came to us for clear advice, information and signposting on topics such as NHS dental access, GP and hospital care, pharmacy issues, mental health support, complaints procedures, patient transport, social care needs, and digital inclusion support.

Championing your voice:



We published **15** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like **Pharmacy, GP's, Hospitals (including Children's A&E), Community Diagnostic Centres and Care Homes.**

Our most popular report was on a visit to Children's A&E at Whiston Hospital, highlighting people's positive and negative experiences of accessing a vital service.

Statutory funding:



We're funded by Halton Borough Council. In 2024/25, we received **£131,251**, which is **1.62% more** than last year.

This increase was due to having a full 12 month period on the renewed Healthwatch Halton contract which began in July 2023.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in Halton. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

Our joint visit to Whiston Children's A&E led to additional staffing, better booking procedures, and plans for clearer signage and digital waiting time displays.



After we raised patient concerns, Warrington Hospital agreed to update patients on waiting lists every three months and provide a new leaflet about pre-op information.



Summer

Our insight on Community Diagnostic Centres formed part of Healthwatch England's report which called for a formal evaluation of the CDC programme.



Our joint report with Healthwatch Warrington found inconsistent hospital discharge experiences and called for better communication, planning, and support for patients and their carers.



Autumn

We highlighted a wheelchair shortage at Whiston Hospital. An audit showed numbers had dropped by over 100. The hospital has now ordered more to meet patient needs.



Our insights on the Pharmacy First service highlighted a need for raised awareness of the scheme and for consistency in referral of patients.



Winter

Our listening events at Hospitals, GP's and in the community gathered the views of over 500 people. Your feedback is helping shape services that work better for everyone.



Following our engagement with Brookfield School, local Speech and Language Therapy services in Halton introduced improvements in response to identified SEND support gaps.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Halton are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at Cheshire & Merseyside ICS

This year, we've worked with all Healthwatch across Cheshire & Merseyside to achieve the following:

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



Cheshire & Merseyside is the third largest ICB area in England. Over the past year, the nine local Healthwatch have worked closely to represent the views of 2.5 million people.

We've agreed how we best share information, meet weekly to keep each other updated, and speak with the ICB and other partners so that local voices are heard and acted on across the region.

The big conversation:



Along with the eight other Healthwatch across Cheshire & Merseyside, we learnt about the experiences of over six thousand residents, who had accessed GP services in the past year.

Our regional ICB (Integrated Care Board), which funded the work, is using the findings to take steps towards a new framework for measuring success, focusing on outcomes for local people. This focus will make a difference in the areas, residents most care about.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



We continue to build strong links within the ICB, attending Board and sub-group meetings while maintaining our Place-based roles. We share attendance at C&M ICB meetings and, in November 2024, met with the Chair of the Quality & Performance Committee to explore how patient feedback can be better used to inform the Committee's discussions.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time.

Here are some examples of our work in Halton this year.

Clearer routes and letters at Whiston Hospital.



Thanks to patient feedback, Whiston Hospital has made changes to improve MRI appointments—especially at weekends.

Patients said signage was confusing and guidance unclear. Healthwatch shared this at the Patient Experience Council, prompting staff to walk the route themselves. Now, signage has been improved and appointment letters are clearer. This shows how people's voices lead to real change. By sharing your experiences, you help make services better for everyone. Thank you for speaking up—it really does make a difference.

Creating opportunities to Shape Care



By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone.

Throughout 2024/25, we've connected local people with new chances to shape NHS services, promoting national roles with NICE and NHS Innovation, and local opportunities like council consultations and Bridgewater governor elections. Our own surveys continue to gather views to influence change. We've also helped NHS staff signpost patients to community support after treatment—ensuring people stay supported once formal care ends. Many of these opportunities weren't available elsewhere locally, so we helped patient voices get heard.

Keeping people informed and connected



We're helping more people in Halton stay informed and connected to local health and care.

We've steadily grown our online reach to help more people find reliable health and care information. Our Facebook posts reached over 33,000 people last year—a 74% increase—with 51% more people clicking, commenting or sharing. By sharing clear, trusted content and encouraging local feedback, we're helping more residents feel informed, supported, and able to influence change in local services.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Listening to your experiences

Listening to Families at Whiston Hospital Children's A&E

Last year, we visited the Children's A&E department at Whiston Hospital along with Healthwatch Knowsley and Healthwatch St Helens.

The aim was to better understand why people chose to attend A&E and what areas could be improved.

What did we do?

A 'Listening Event' was held at Whiston Hospital's Children's A&E department. This allowed us to hear directly from families about their experiences at the Hospital, giving us insight into service quality, communication, and waiting times. Our observations focused on accessibility, signage, cleanliness, communication, and the provision of information.

Key things we heard:



74% rated the service as 'good' or 'amazing'.



Staff were consistently described as friendly, helpful and informative.



Confusing booking-in process, especially when reception was closed. Long waits with little or outdated information on waiting times.



Poor signage and difficulties accessing the unit. Lack of a designated quiet area for children with Autism/ADHD.

What difference did this make?

The hospital recruited six new admin staff to keep reception staffed for more of the day, improved signage, and plans to add an electronic screen for waiting times. A designated quiet space for children with additional needs is now better signposted, enhancing access, communication, and support for families attending Children's A&E.

Listening to your experiences

Accessing GP services

Accessing GP services remains one of the most common issues raised with Healthwatch Halton. As part of a region-wide project across Cheshire and Merseyside, we wanted to understand people's experiences of booking and attending GP appointments—especially in light of the NHS's Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (PCARP).

What did we do?

Between October 2024 and March 2025, we gathered feedback from 768 people through online and paper surveys, as well as in-person outreach sessions across Halton. We spoke to a wide range of people, including carers, disabled patients, and those with long-term conditions, to build a clearer picture of the barriers people face when trying to get GP appointments.

Key things we heard:



72%

of people used the telephone to contact their GP, but many struggled with long waits and early morning rushes.

23%

were unable to get an appointment when they tried

What difference will this make?

Our findings have been shared directly with the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB), who are using the feedback to improve access to primary care. The ICB has recognised this work as a vital “temperature check” on whether services are meeting public needs. We will continue working with them to ensure patient voices shape future changes, particularly for those most affected by access issues such as carers and digitally excluded groups.

“Healthwatch have undertaken a vital survey with our population on how they perceive access in our GP practices. The ICB is using the information to inform future plans to make care more responsive and accessible.”

Clare Watson – Assistant Chief Executive, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Halton. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Listening to the experiences of local veterans through partnership drop-ins with the Halton Veterans Legion.
- Listening to our LGBTQ+ community by taking part in the annual Pride event.
- Supporting access to healthcare for people experiencing homelessness.
- Making sure local people's voices are heard by joining Patient Experience meetings at both our local hospital trusts, where we share honest feedback about what patients say is working well—and what isn't.



Hearing from all communities

Improving care and support for veterans

During outreach at the Vision Support group, we heard from Tom, a 95-year-old visually impaired veteran who was living alone and in need of support for daily living and social interaction.

We referred him to a number of organisations for support including Age UK, Halton Borough Council, and the Royal British Legion for tailored assistance.

What difference did this make?

Through our support, Tom was assessed and now receives support from the Royal British Legion and social care to secure supported accommodation. With support in place he has planned a holiday with the Blind Veterans Association, improving his overall wellbeing.

Helping People Get Online to Access Health Services

During our outreach sessions, we met more and more people who couldn't get online to access health and care services, either because they didn't have enough data on their phones or couldn't afford it. This meant they were struggling to do basic things like book a GP appointment, find health advice, or fill in forms for support.

We found out about the **National Databank**, a scheme by **The Good Things Foundation**, that provides free SIM cards with data, calls, and texts to people who need them, and we joined the scheme in May 2024.

This year, we've given SIM cards to 73 people we met who were digitally excluded, including low-income families and others going through tough times.

What difference did this make?

Providing these free data SIMs has allowed people who previously struggled to access health services, book appointments, and stay connected, making a real difference for those facing digital exclusion and struggling to get support.

Information and signposting

Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint, or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us. This year 15,104 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Hosting regular drop-ins to offer up-to-date, trustworthy information
- Helping individuals access the services they need
- Supporting people in managing their health and wellbeing
- Offering personalised signposting to additional sources of help and support
- Providing a wide range of information on accessing health and care services on our website.



Barriers to GP Appointments

Joan felt excluded from her GP practice after she heard they were switching to online booking only for appointments.

Joan lived in sheltered accommodation. She had no smart phone or internet access and limited mobility. Her GP practice told her she would need to get someone to help her book appointments.

She told us she would like to switch to another GP practice, closer to her home. We gave her details of alternative practices and offered some practical steps for switching GPs.

Joan said she felt listened to and supported. Joan's story also contributed to our wider understanding of increasing digital exclusion issues among some GP patients.

Support received after mother's concerns

Sue was unsure where to go to get mental health support for her adult daughter.

Sue contacted us as she was worried about her adult daughter's mental health. She had tried reaching out to several services before but didn't feel they were listening.

We discussed her concerns and referred the case to adult social care and a local wellbeing hub to coordinate a response.

Sue later got back in touch with us to say that her daughter had since been contacted by services, and said she felt relieved and thankful that someone had taken action.

A lack of reasonable adjustments

Jasmine contacted us as she has autism and several long-term health conditions and was finding hospital appointments really stressful.

She often didn't get the extra support she needed, and staff weren't always aware of her condition. This made attending appointments upsetting and overwhelming.

We got in touch with the hospitals Jasmine regularly visited. We asked them to add an alert to their systems to flag the patient's support needs. We also helped link the patient to the right teams, including specialist nurses and the Patient Experience Team at one of the hospitals.

The patient is now flagged on hospital systems at three different NHS trusts, so staff know in advance that they may need to make reasonable adjustments.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 32 days to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve
- Helped gather patients experiences of care at local hospitals
- Have supported our new reader panel for local trusts, and also provided support in our office work



Showcasing volunteer impact

At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.



"In my volunteer role as an Advisory Board Member I enjoy being able to raise awareness of health matters locally to others, and doing this with Healthwatch Halton enables me to use my skills, experience and knowledge to give something back to our community that may help and benefit others."

Lorna

"My volunteering lets me meet people and allows me to give something to the community as well as helping health organisations in our area."

John



"I really enjoyed the working environment which was quiet and relaxed. I could use my headphones and listen to music whilst working. I have learnt all the ins and outs of GP websites and have a good understanding of what Healthwatch Halton does. I enjoyed my time with the team."

Student from Ashley High School 6th Form

Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



www.healthwatchhalton.co.uk



0300 777 6543



enquiries@healthwatchhalton.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Halton Borough Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Funding from local authority	£131,251	Expenditure on pay	£101,107
Additional income	£3,472	Non-pay expenditure	£22,873
		Office and management fee	£21,113
Total income	£134,723	Total Expenditure	£145,092

Additional income is broken down into:

- £2,083 received from the local ICS for joint work on a project.
- £1,388 received from the local ICS for joint work on a project.

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across Cheshire & Merseyside also received funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
£15,000* for our Healthwatch Cheshire & Merseyside collaborative to undertake a substantial survey of our population around Access to GP Services.	£15,000

* Healthwatch Halton received £1666 inc VAT as our share. This is included within our additional income above (£1,388 exc VAT).

Finance and future priorities

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

- Access to Primary Care services.
- Access to Women's services : Maternity Services and Women's Health.
- Care Homes – Improving quality, dignity, and oversight in adult social care.

“On behalf of the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to each of our nine local Healthwatch for your challenge, insight, and advocacy on behalf of our residents.

Your work has been instrumental in ensuring that the voices of people across our communities—particularly those who are seldom heard—are not only listened to but acted upon. Whether through your detailed reports, community engagement, or your presence at our Board and Committee meetings, you have consistently brought forward the lived experiences that will help to shape better, fairer, and more responsive services.

Over the past year, your contributions have helped us navigate complex challenges—from recovery planning and service redesign to addressing health inequalities and improving access. Your role as a critical friend has strengthened our accountability and sharpened our focus on what matters most to the people we serve.

As we move forward into a period of transformation resulting from the national changes to ICBs, the impending publication of the 10 Year Plan, the development of Neighbourhood focussed health partnerships and the financial challenges the local system faces, your continued partnership will be vital.

We look forward to deepening our collaboration as we work together to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities across Cheshire and Merseyside.”

Raj Jain – Chair, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB).

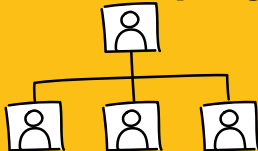


ECS

Engaging Communities Solutions CSR highlights

Engaging Communities Solutions CIC are the providers of seven local Healthwatch and an Advocacy provider. We are committed to developing our corporate social responsibility and this is a round up of our highlights for the year 2024/25

Our employees



Across our organisation we have **21** full time employees. As we have a commitment to flexible working to support our employees with their lives outside of work we also have **10** employees who work less than the standard number of hours per week.

50% of our senior management are female and **78%** of our middle managers are female.

All our staff have access to an **employee assistance** scheme that provides mental wellbeing support.

We are a **real living wage** employer.

Our community



Our employees were supported to give **27.5 hours** of volunteering time to their communities this year with paid time off to volunteer.

We provided the equivalent of **24 weeks** of meaningful work placements for school, college and university students.

Our staff raised **£304.50** for charities last year.

We supported **89** volunteers last year who gave **1163** hours of their time to our work.

Our supply chain



During the last 12 months we have spent **£25,853** with other VCSE organisations.

The environment



We have saved **4,914** car miles by using public transport this year.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Halton, A.R.T. Centre, Tan House Lane, Widnes WA8 0RR

Engaging Community Solutions CIC (ECS), Meeting Point House, Southwater Square, Telford, TF3 4HS.

Healthwatch Halton uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

Our Healthwatch Board consists of four members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2024/25, the Board met four times and made decisions on matters such as reviewing and approving our workplan priorities for the coming year, and approving publication of our reports.

We involve the public in setting our priorities by reviewing feedback trends, analysing signposting enquiries, and running an annual priorities survey.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services.

During 2024/25, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website, www.healthwatchhalton.co.uk and hard copies are made available on request.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us.

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to the One Halton Quality & Performance Group, One Halton Primary Care Commissioning Group and the One Halton Children & Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Board.

As part of a network of nine local Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside, we regularly take insight and share public experiences to decision-makers in the Cheshire & Merseyside ICS. Together, we attend a number of Integrated Care Board (ICB) committees and working groups to ensure people's voices are central to planning and delivery.

Over the past year, we've shared what people are telling us at the Integrated Care Board and key committees like the System Primary Care Committee and Quality & Performance Committee.

We also meet weekly with our Healthwatch colleagues across the region to coordinate insight, look for emerging trends, and ensure a strong, united voice is brought to local system leaders.

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Halton is represented on the Halton Health and Wellbeing Board by Lydia Hughes, Healthwatch Halton Chair.

During 2024/25 our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing public feedback with the board and presenting findings from our reports.

Healthwatch Halton is represented on the One Halton Partnership Board by Dave Wilson, Healthwatch Halton Chief Officer.

Statutory statements

Enter and View

Location	Reason for visit	What we did as a result
St.Luke's Care Home	To view the care provided.	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service responded and followed up on these and are planning improvements of the environment for residents.
Oak Meadow Community Support Centre	To view the care provided.	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service responded and followed up on these, and have introduced improvements to improve the recording of residents dietary needs. Improvements to the decor are are planned.

2024 – 2025 some additional outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Listening Events across local hospitals	Improvements for patients have included, more available wheelchairs, improved signage, clearer hospital appointment letters, extra staffing on busy areas.
Cheshire & Merseyside All Together Smokefree campaign	Shared information and raised awareness with the public of the Smokefree campaign.
Brookfield School	We took a series of questions from parents and staff at Brookfield School to providers and commissioners. Better links are now in place between the school and local services.

Delivered by:

Engaging Communities Solutions
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